



Susan Howe

I often think of the space of a page as a stage, with words, letters, syllable characters moving across.

Third Saturday Poesy Café
September 15, 2018
Presenter: Tom Corrado

Why Susan Howe?

August 2017. Sweltering. Shirtless, in shorts and Crocs, I walk to the mailbox for the mail. *The New Yorker*. August 7 & 14. Thumbing through it, I find a photograph of an older woman who looks like my friend Nancy. Intrigued, I begin reading the article, a review by Dan Chiasson of *Debths*, a book of poems by the poet, Susan Howe. I am not familiar with her poetry. The pull quote accompanying the article says *Howe brings to avant-garde poetry the pressing emotional stakes of memoir*. This is my cup of tea. My kind of mash-up. I am hooked.

Bio

Susan Howe is an American poet, scholar, essayist, and critic. She was born on June 10, 1937 in Boston, Massachusetts, and grew up in nearby Cambridge. Her mother, Mary Manning, was an Irish playwright and actor with Dublin's Gate Theater. Her father, Mark DeWolfe Howe, was a professor at Harvard Law School. She has two sisters, Helen Howe Braider and Fanny Howe, who, according to Chaisson, is also a poet of rival brilliance and distinction: *Susan and Fanny Howe are, for what it's worth, probably the most important sibling poets in American literature. It is a tribute to their instincts that, despite their hoard of shared impressions, they usually sound nothing alike*. Susan Howe graduated from the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts in 1961. She has been married three times: to Harvey Quaytman, a painter, David von Schlegell, a sculptor, and Peter Hewitt Hare, a philosopher and

professor at the University of Buffalo, who died in 2008. She has two children, R. H. Quaytman, a painter, and Mark von Schlegell, a writer. She lives in Guilford, Connecticut.

Poetics

On October 8th, 2015, Susan Howe began her lecture at the Columbus College of Arts and Design with the following which pretty much capsulizes her method of composing poems: *For this lecture I've combined images from research libraries and special collections with my spoken/written text without supplying a narrative logic or stopping to identify each one thus allowing you to make your own connections.*

Susan Howe is a Language poet. She is interested in the language of words, the appearance of words, how words can be manipulated to spur the collaboration of the reader or listener in deciphering a bunch of symbols on a surface.

Making meaning - i.e., *to understand* - involves interpretation. To interpret text, a reader grabs whatever contextual cues are available, and uses them to engage closure. Tweaking textual symbols, then, impacts interpretation; interpretation impacts understanding; understanding impacts closure; closure impacts take-away or the meaning one ascribes to a text.

Sidebar!

I'm sure most of you are familiar with *The Marlup Exercise* which was created in the early '70s by Kenneth Goodman to demonstrate the difference between reading and reading comprehension.

Reading the following "nonsense" paragraph, you will be able to answer questions about it despite not having the foggiest notion of what it's about:

A marlup was poving his kump. Farmily a narg horped some whev in his kump. "Why did vump horp whev in my frinkle kump?" the marlup ju'd the narg. "Erm muvvily trungy," the narg gruppued. "Er heshed vump norpled whev in your kump. Do vump pove your kump frinkle?"

Questions:

1. What was the marlup poving?
2. What did the narg horp in the marlups kump?
3. How trungy was the narg?
4. Who or what did the marlup ju'?

Answers:

1. Kump
2. Whev
3. Muvvily trungy
4. The narg

Although most readers are able to read this passage and answer simple rote questions about it, they would be hard pressed to answer with any degree of certainty the following comprehension question:

What do you think the marlup will do next?

However, if asked to spin out a hypothetical answer, most would be able to do so.

Goodman used this exercise to demonstrate that reading comprehension is more than simply decoding words. Readers must be able to read with understanding in order to construct meaning from text.

Most people are uncomfortable with ambiguity, and, faced with it, will attempt to reduce it, to make sense of it, to try to figure out what it means.

In poetry, the greater the accessibility, the less the ambiguity. A highly-accessible poem, then, is a poem with a clear, well-breadcrumbed path. It may be less intimidating and easier to *figure out* or understand than a *Language* poem. Understanding, however, is rarely all-or-none but rather multi-layered; drilling down through layers of complexity will yield greater understanding.

Language poetry emphasizes the readers role in giving meaning to a work. It downplays expression, seeing the poem as a construction in and of language itself. It developed in part in response to what poets considered the uncritical use of expressive lyric sentiment among earlier poetry movements.

A Language poem, despite its use of everyday speech, has a different texture than other poems, and often appears alien and difficult to understand, which is what Language poetry is all about, that is, engaging the reader or listener in creating the meaning of a poem.

Howe's interest in the visual possibilities of language can be traced back to her training in the visual arts: a one-time painter, she enjoyed some success in New York's art world. In a 2012 *Paris Review* interview, she commented: *I often think of the space of a page as a stage, with words, letters, syllable characters moving across.*

In composing her spare, experimental, astringent poems, Howe excavates text, mining and juxtaposing archival information. Layered and allusive, her work draws on early American history and primary documents, weaving quotation and image into poems in a way that often alters standard typography.

In addition to historical sources of material, she is interested in the accidents, smudges, and tears that *fasten* words to a page and often include them in her compositions.

Her collagistic layerings of historical, mythical, and other source material, which are often presented in an unorthodox format, cross genres and disciplines in their theoretical underpinnings and use of archival information, blurring the lines between traditional modes of fiction, essay, prose, memoir, and poetry.

By cutting away at narrative coherence, Howe's innovative verse forces readers to focus their attention on language, recreating the poets commentary to bring the past as something new and meaningful into their own worlds. This compositional subversion of the implicit contract among author, text, and reader places Howe in the postmodernist camp.

For Howe, poetry is a form of literary and historical research. But perhaps the most striking thing about her method is that, while working largely via the collage of source materials and prioritizing the telling fragment which needs and receives little gloss or explanation, she nevertheless remains dedicated to a visionary *spirit of romance* where the poem often performs a *nekuia rite*. Nekuia (or, nekylia) is an ancient Greek rite whereby the dead are made to speak again, and questioned about the future.

Howe has sometimes placed her verse upside-down, or crossed out parts of it, or let the words overlap one another, characteristics that may have to do with her early training as a visual artist. Some critics have likened her poems to paintings on the page, the large gaps between words providing white spaces that are meant to convey as much meaning as the words themselves. Her work is also marked by plays upon words that possess phonetic similarities. Stephen Paul Martin noted that *by asking us to focus on the tangible presence of language itself - on the morphemes, phonemes, and graphemes that words are made of - Howe moves us away from our tendency to think in abstractions, easing us into the motion and fabric of a verbal space that has not been reduced to a mere zone of representation. We are asked to see and hear the shapes and sounds of the words instead of reading through them to what they supposedly refer to. Our sense of discursive or narrative continuity shatters, replaced with the endless Protean linkages that give language its living power.*

According to Bruce Campbell, *Susan Howe is a kind of post-structuralist visionary who, while attuned to a transcendental possibility, is fully aware of how mediated both language and consciousness are. This awareness leads her to*

acknowledge and investigate history, but, recognizing, as she does, the infinite miscalculation of history, she cannot accept history as truth. Yet, truth be told, neither can she ignore history.

Over a career spanning 40 years, Howe has returned again and again to the problems and possibilities of history. Thematically, much of her work also centers on themes of existence, remembering, and the unique position of the female gender in relation to history and the written word.

With her first book, *Hinge Picture* (1974), Howe speaks from the standpoint of an unknown author who existed at some point in time on the bridge between prehistory and history. From this primeval writer may have come the Bible, and Howe's verse relates a tale that integrates mythological sources, ancient texts, and classical writings. Throughout the 1970s Howe continued to enjoy success with literary-press editions of her work. Volumes published during this time include *Chanting at the Crystal Sea* (1975), *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978), and *The Liberties* (1980). In *The Liberties*, Howe examines the relationship between Jonathan Swift and Esther (Hester) Johnson who served as a muse of sorts to the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish satirical novelist. The role Johnson may have played in Swift's literary output can only be conjectured, and Howe brings Johnson to life at the end of *The Liberties*, making Swift a ghost and reducing him to an invisible presence as well.

Howe's next collections, including *Defenestration of Prague* (1983) and *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), are among her most celebrated.

Defenestration of Prague subtly comments on the division between Ireland and Northern Ireland, through the title poems restaging of an incident in Prague in 1617, when Catholic clerics were thrown from windows to their deaths by supporters of Calvinism, marking the beginning of the Thirty Years War. Howe's use of history as a prism through which to view the present is typical; as she has noted in interviews, history for her is an ongoing subconscious thread.

My Emily Dickinson, the book that first brought Howe wide attention, examines Dickinson and the constrictions under which she wrote as a thinking, opinionated, and educated woman in an era that viewed these talents with suspicion. According to the critic, Marjorie Perloff, Howe, prompted, at least in part, by her objection to the portrayal of Dickinson as a kind of *madwoman in the attic*, from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's celebrated feminist study by that title, argues that Dickinson, far from being the neurotic and repressed recluse of Amherst, was a strong poet, keenly interested in her culture, and unusually well-read. Pulling pieces of geometry, geology, alchemy, philosophy, politics, biography, biology, mythology, and philology from alien territory, Dickinson audaciously invented a new grammar grounded in humility and hesitation (Perloff reminds us that the Latin *hesitate* means *to stick*). Here, and in her later *Logic of Sumptuary Values* in *The Birth-mark*, Howe shows to what extent Dickinson's curious punctuation,

especially the dash, interrupting as it does the flow of the poem from inside the structure of the poem, revolutionized our understanding of Dickinson's work, and introduced, perhaps inadvertently, a new hybrid mode of writing.

In his Introduction to the reprint edition of *My Emily Dickinson* (2007), Eliot Weinberger calls it *a poet's book, a classic of writers writing on writers in the tradition of D. H. Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Literature, Charles Olson's Call Me Ishmael, William Carlos Williams's In the American Grain, Robert Duncan's The H. D. Book, and H. D.'s own Tribute to Freud*. But Marjorie Perloff, in *Spectral Telepathy: the Late Style of Susan Howe* (2016), is quick to point out that Howe's critical books, of which *My Emily Dickinson* is the first, have a somewhat different *valence* from those that Weinberger cites, distinguished as hers are by their poetic structure, in which documentary material - facts, dates, place names, citations - are so fully absorbed into the lyric fabric that the texts come to function as long poems in their own right, no longer distinguishable from the volumes classified as poetry like her poems in *The Midnight* or *THAT THIS*. The key in Howe's case is a fierce empathy - a sense of becoming the other - a channeling - in what Howe herself has called an act of *spectral telepathy*, of mesmerism.

Howe's fascination with historical texts, and the realm of history itself, is manifest throughout her later work as well. *A Bibliography of the King's Book, or, Eikon Basilike* (1989) takes as its departure a manuscript ascribed to the English regent Charles I, whose reign launched a seventeenth-century civil war in England and ultimately resulted in his beheading.

In *Singularities* (1990), Howe examines the Indian Wars in New England during the colonial era, and the subsequent settling of the continent. The work binds three earlier poems: "Thorow" (a phonetic misspelling of Henry David Thoreau), "Scattering As Behavior Toward Risk," and "Articulation of Sound Forms in Time." This last work, first published alone in 1987, is loosely based on the diaries of a New England minister lost in the wilderness during the era. Subtly connecting the plight of the minister with the role of the female poet in the English language, Howe's analysis, explained Sara Fisher in *Belles Lettres, is of an America that defines itself in a distorted mirror of history - one that believes in the mirage of progress through the conquest of nature and the creation of heroes and mythical male figures who cannot see themselves as finite. With these restrictions, Fisher notes, a woman poet - such as Dickinson - is the ultimate outsider*.

Howe's *Pierce-Arrow* (1999), blends historical scholarship, and experimental poetics to investigate the figure of Charles S. Pierce, an American logician and philosopher whose work on pragmatism predated that of William James. Using an incredible array of source materials, Howe crafts three long sequences that circulate around Pierce's autobiography and the mysterious figure of his wife, as well as including references to diverse sources including Dickens, Schiller, and Husserl. Brian Lennon in his *Boston Review* piece on the book noted *that Howe is*

staking everything on the venture that theory and practice, artifice and application, are perpetually messily entwined.

In *The Midnight* (1999), Howe uses archives, family documents, photographs, found text, and lyric to investigate her compositional process, Irish ancestry, and the life of the nineteenth-century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Reviewing *The Midnight in Jacket*, Stephen Collins called the book *a fitting addition to Howe's continuing excursus on the American literary wilderness*, adding that *it extends what is one of the most unusual and dispersed autobiographies in contemporary letters - the reading of a life through words of others.*

In *Souls of Labadie Tract* (2007), Howe uses an obscure Utopian sect as catalyst to return to the religious landscape of early New England. Andrew Zawacki in the *Boston Review* described the project as *an excavation of site and citation, of quasi-utopian polis and poetry half-smothered in local history.*

THAT THIS (2010) is a collection of four pieces in which Howe seeks to come to terms with the sudden death of her third husband, Peter Hewitt Hare. The four sections take radically different formal *approaches* to his loss, in the sense of going backwards in time, to the days just before Hare's fatal embolism, and in the sense of finding a means of understanding, or at least of moving forward. The first section, "Disappearance Approach," begins with paintings by Poussin, then uses a simple, diaristic prose through which Howe incorporates the terse capitals of Hare's autopsy, along with a variety of 18th-century epistolary condolences, phantoms, elusive remnants, and snakes. The result conveys Howe's sense of *being present at a point of absence where crossing centuries may prove to be like crossing languages*. The next section, "Frolic Architecture," inspired by visits to the vast 18th-century Jonathan Edwards archives at the Beinecke and accompanied by six black-and-white photograms by James Welling, presents hauntingly lovely, oblique text-collages that Howe (with scissors and invisible Scotch Tape and a Canon copier) has twisted, flattened, and snipped into *inscapes of force*. The title section follows with seven pages of strophic, hymnlike verse, where

Grass angels perish in this
harmonic collision because
non-being cannot be this.

That this book is a history of
a shadow that is a shadow of
Me mystically one in another
another another to subserve

By the final, untitled collage, Howe has made her grief speak as much through textual interstices and shifts in diction and form as through each singular elegy.

Her latest, and rumored to be her last, collection of poetry, *Debths* (2017), winner of the 2018 Griffin Poetry Prize, takes its name from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, and, according to Douglas Messerli in *Hyperallergic* (2017), *is a combine that suggests to the poetic ear several words simultaneously: depths, debts, and death in the toiling moil, the deep turmoil of which Joyce writes.*

For Chaisson, *Debths* is a hybrid animal, a composite of autobiographical prose, minimalist verse, collaged, and, mostly, puzzlingly, illegible clippings of old texts, and lots of white space, a meandering in and out of forms, that signals her approach to some of her important obsessions - home and childhood, Boston and surrounding areas, accident, and insight.

Here, again, is Messerli:

These poems collage Paul Thek's art, nineteenth-century American literature, and a fairy tale to create a fresh understanding of the memory and soul

In her eloquent "Foreword" to this work, the poet hints at some of these overlaying depths and debts, including her childhood experiences at the Little Sir Echo Camp for Girls, where she was marooned by her parents and took part in campfire stories and private readings.

Howe, always the experimental Brahmin, creates a poetic space in which figures such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville rub shoulders with Henry James and the lesser-known William Austin. The English fairy tale, *Tom Tit Tot* (German: *Rumpelstiltskin*) is interlaid within collages with Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, Coleridge's *Collected Letters*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Spinoza's *Ethics*. In *Debths*, Bing Crosby sings to Titian. The authors Irish heritage and early exposure to writing and theater and her Cambridge, Massachusetts, upbringing further contextualize these works.

By assimilating *Tom Tit Tot* into her work, Howe suggests that survival often lies in one's attention to detail and ability to perceive what is important amid the clutter of experience, a listening-and-observing process that women throughout time have mastered for their survival.

Howe's "Tom Tit Tot" is a conceptual work that appropriates fragments of other texts so as to create an entirely new angle on the fairy tale, demonstrating how contemporary technique, facsimile, xerography, overprint, digital processing can reanimate literary texts and make them new (Marjorie Perloff, *Spectral Telepathy: The Late Style of Susan Howe*, 2016).

Little of the *Tom Tit Tot* tale is embedded in Howe's collages; yet, given the events of that story, we are forced to perceive each fragmented passage as a kind of epistle upon which our lives depend. The poems that comprise *Debths* are pithy tales of castles, imprisonment (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* collides with passages about

castles from which damsels are rescued), and towers with the bell ringing at / the speaker who has left the woods. A bit like Stephen Sondheim's mash-up of fairy tales in his *Into the Woods*, Howe's collages embrace a romantically dangerous world where women and children are put into dire distress, but escape nonetheless. Yet, Howe makes it clear that we cannot truly escape either our destinies or fatalities. As she admits in the poem, "Periscope,"

I sold your shadow for you too

*Let's let bygones be bygones
Dust to dust we barely reach.*

The book's final section, called "Debths," is a poetry of death, a series of mostly indiscernible words, which, even when a fragment can be made out - *Ah, so the quiet was . . . or Death, the TREE OF KNOWLEDGE . . . or upon the frontier of unimagined night . . .* - speaks of both a spiritual and personal endgame.

Masserli concludes his review of *Debths* with this: Howe has suggested that this may be her last book. Let us hope not. But, nonetheless, we are fortunate to have such a brilliant example of her art to console us. Unlike the poor girl in Tom Tit Tot, Howe assertively realizes her extraordinary power as a writer:

*Woodslippercounterclatter
I can spin straw by myself*

Books

Hinge Picture (1974)
Chanting at the Crystal Sea (1975)
The Western Borders (1976)
Thorn, thistle, apron leaf (1976)
Secret History of the Dividing Line (1978)
Cabbage Gardens (1979)
The Liberties (1980)
Pythagorean Silence (1982)
Defenestration of Prague (1983)
My Emily Dickinson (1985, 2007)
Incloser (1985)
Heliopathy (1986)
Articulation of Sound Forms in Time (1987)
A Bibliography of the Kings Book, or Eikon Basilike (1989)
The Europe of Trusts (1990)
Singularities (1990)
Silence Wager Stories (1992)
The Nonconformists Memorial (1993)
The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History (1993)

Interview with Lynn Keller (1995)
Frame Structures (1996)
Deux Et (1998)
Pierce-Arrow (1999)
The Midnight (1999)
Bed Hangings I (2001)
Bed Hangings II (2002)
Kidnapped (2002)
Souls of the Labadie Track (2007)
THAT THIS (2010)
Frolic Architecture (2011)
The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinsons Envelope Poems (2013)
Sorting Facts, or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker (2013)
Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives (2014)
Woodslippercounterclatter (2014)
The Quarry (2015)
Debths (2017)

Awards

American Book Award (1981 & 1986)
Guggenheim Fellowship (1996)
Roy Harvey Pearce Prize for Lifetime Achievement (1997)
Berlin Prize (2009)
Bollingen Prize in American Poetry (2011)
Robert Frost Medal, Poetry Society of America (2017)
Griffin Poetry Prize (2018)

Poems

from *Debths*

When I was eight my parents packed me off to Little Sir Echo Camp for Girls on Lake Armington in the foothills of New Hampshire co-founded and owned by Mary Hoisington and Margaret Conoboy ten years earlier. Apparently the women chose the name because of an echo . . .

~

A work of art is a world of signs, at least to the poet's
nursery bookshelf sheltered behind the artist's ear.

I recall each little motto howling its ins and outs
to those of us who might as well be on the moon
illu illu illu

~

Beacon

A tiny artificial theater of the world. I am here to slay the
dragon in the ready-made name of an earlier Susan. While
there is still time do you know anything about my watch
being stopped? Put your hand over my eyes and say I have
got it in my mind.

Ceramic, plaster, laquer, newspaper

~

Ellen Sturgis Hooper. 1812-1848.

Thanks to Boston here is a poem.

"I slept, and dreamed that life was beauty

I woke and found that life was duty

Was thy dream then a shadowy lie?

Toil on poor heart, unceasingly. . . ."

Glass, plasticine, dried flowers, foliage

~

For what Porpoise

My body is made of bones. In times of trouble and perplexity I
can bend my limbs and stretch half fish half Fishman in

the tower with the bell ringing at
 the speaker has left the dark wood:
 light walk out

from *Cabbage Gardens*

The past
 will overtake
 alien force
 our house
 formed
 of my mind
 to enter
 explorer
 in a forest
 of myself
 for all
 my learning
 Solitude
 quiet
 and quieter
 fringe
 of trees
 by a river
 bridges black
 on the deep
 the heaving sea
 a watcher stands
 to see her ship
 winging away
 Thick noises
 merge in moonlight
 dark ripples
 dissolving
 and
 defining
 spheres
 and
 snares

Place of importance as in the old days
 stood on the ramparts of the fort

the open sea outside
alone with water-birds and cattle
knee-deep in a stream
grove of reeds
herons watching from the bank
henges
whole fields honeycombed with souterrains
human
bones through the gloom
whose sudden mouth
surrounded my face
a thread of blue around the coast
feathery moon
eternity swallows up time
peaceable as foam
O cabbage gardens
summers elegy
sunset survived

from *Hinge Picture*

"Crawl in," said the witch, "and see if it's hot enough to put the bread in."
- Hansel and Gretel

All roads lead to rooms.
- Irish Proverb

a stark

Quake

a numb
Calm

clutching my Crumbl
ejumble
among
Tombs and
in Caves
my
Dream
Vision
Oarsman, oarsman,
Where have you been?
I've been to Leafy,
I've dismembered the Queen.

Oarsman, oarsman
What did you there?
I hid in a cleft,
I braided the air.

hearing our oars where their freed goatsteps sped
and are silent
by an extinct river
O Babylon when I lay down
alert for sliding cataracts
where in corridors the print of dancing feet
beyond poise I am prey
posing in snow-light
being of human form
clothed in the scales of a fish

Count him a magician
he controls the storm
walked on the sea shouting
that he is the Logos of God
that he is the Word original and first begotten
attended by power
upheld by his mother
(a very active gesturing baby)
what if Simon Peter Jesus himself
walked among the cold stone faces
shouting NIKA
emptyeyed blanksmiling

Swiftmess divination these false gods
their commerce is the cloud
so they can learn what is preparing in the sky
Artificer of the universe
Magician who controls the storm
to see you in one spot
I count the clouds others count the seasons
Dreaming of archipelagos and the desert
I have lived through weeks of years
I have raked up fallen leaves for winter
after winter across an empire of icy light

Light of our dark is the fruit of my womb
or night falling through the reign of splashes
Liquid light that bathes the landscape in my figure
Clairvoyant Ireland
eras and eras encircled by sea

the barrows of my ancestors have spilled their bones
across the singing ear in hear or shell
as wreck or wrack may be in daring
There were giants on the earth in those days
feasts then on hill and fort
All night the borders of my bed
carve paths across my face
and I always forget to leave my address
frightened by the way that midnight
grips my palm and tells me that my lines
are slipping out of question

Divorce I manumission round
with a gentle blow the casting branch
my right hand My covenant
was garment concealed or mask or matron
Proceed with measured step
the field and action of the law
Like day the tables twelve
whip torch and radiate halo
Sky brewing coming storm
Faraway over the hill
when Hell was harrowed
and earth was brought to heel
how the hills spread away
how the walls crumbled
deathcolored frozen in time
Where was the senate zone and horizon
Where are the people mountain of light to the east
Tell them I sail for the deep sea rest
a painless extraction a joyful day
bird of passage over all I love
Goodbye to all the little fir trees
of the future

far off in the dread
blindness I heard light
eagerly I struck my foot
against a stone and
raised a din at the
sound the blessed Paul
shut the door which had
been open and bolted it

from *THAT THIS*

Day is a type when visible
objects change then put

on form but the anti-type
That thing not shadowed

The way music is formed of
cloud and fire once actually

concrete now accidental as
half truth or as whole truth

Is light anything like this
stray pencil commonplace

copy as to one aberrant
onward-gliding mystery

A secular arietta variation
Grass angels perish in this

harmonic collision because
non-being cannot be this

Not spirit not space finite
Not infinite to those fixed -

That this millstone as such
Quiet which side on which -

Is one mind put into another
in us unknown to ourselves

by going about among trees
and fields in moonlight or in

a garden to ease distance to
fetch home spiritual things

That a solitary person bears
witness to law in the ark to
an altar of snow and every
age or century for a day *is*

from *The Midnight*

For here we are here

B E D H A N G I N G S

daylight does not reach

Vast depth on the wall

Neophyte

Alapeen Paper Patch Muslin

Calico Camlet Dimity Fustian

Serge linsey-woolsey say

A wainscot bedsten & Curtans

& vallains & iron Rodds

Many bedsteds were roped

"Bedsted. . . & bed Rope

from *Pythagorean Silence*

1.

age of earth and us all chattering

a sentence or character
suddenly

steps out to seek for truth fails
falls

into a stream of ink Sequence
trails off

must go on
waving fables and faces War
doings of the war

maneuvering between points

between

any two points which is
what we want (issues at stake)
bearings and so

holes in a cloud are minutes passing
which is
which
view odds of images swept rag-tag

silver and grey
epitomes

seconds forgeries engender
(are blue) or blacker

flocks of words flying together tense
as an order

cast off to crows

from *Rückenfigur*

Iseult stands at Tintagel
on the mid stairs between
light and dark symbolism
Does she stand for phonic
human overtone for outlaw
love the dread pull lothly
for weariness actual brute
predestined fact for phobic
falling no one talking too
Tintagel ruin of philosophy
here is known change here
is come crude change wave
wave determinist caparison
Your soul your separation

But the counterfeit Iseult
Iseult aux Blanchés Mains
stands by the wall to listen
Phobic thought of openness
a soul also has two faces
Iseults mother and double
Iseult the Queen later in T

Even Tros echoes Tristans
infirmity through spurious
etymology the Tintagel of Fo
not the dead city of night
Wall in the element of Logic
here is a door and beyond
here is the sail she spies
Tristran Tristan Tristrant
Tristram Trystan Trystram
Tristrem Tristanz Drust
Drystan these names concoct
a little wreath of victory
dreaming over the landscape
Tintagel font icon twilight
Grove bough dark wind cove
brine testimony Iseult salt
Iseut Isolde Ysolt Essyllt
bride of March Marc Mark in
the old French commentaries
your secret correspondence
Soft Iseut two Iseults one
The third of Tristans overt
identities is a double one
his disguise as nightingale
in Tros then wild man in Fo
Level and beautiful La Blanche
Lande of disguise episodes
the nocturnal garden of Tros
Fo recalls the scene in Ovid
Orpheus grief stricken over
the loss of Eurydice sits by
the bank of a river seven days
I see Marks shadow in water
Marks moral right to Iseult
Davids relationship to Saul...